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TAGS: [CH](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [HK](#) [TBIO](#)
SUBJECT: HONG KONG'S RESPONSE TO MAINLAND CONTAMINATED MILK
POWDER

REF: BEIJING 3635

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The response by Hong Kong authorities and food retailers to reports of melamine contaminated milk powder in the Mainland and in Hong Kong has so far been swift and transparent. Even before the first of two Hong Kong cases of melamine-linked infant illness was reported on 20 September, health authorities were actively testing infant formula and other products, and major retail chains were voluntarily removing suspect items from grocery shelves. As of September 23, ten items have tested positive for melamine in amounts ranging from 1.4 to 21 parts per million (ppm). In reaction to these test results, the Hong Government enacted an amended regulation, effective September 23, which bans the importation and sale of dairy products and infant foods with melamine concentrations of more than 1 ppm, and any food product with a concentration in excess of 2.5 ppm. The Hong Kong Hospital Authority has established a pediatric renal taskforce and designated seven Special Assessment Centers, supported by 18 specialty clinics, to centrally identify, track and treat children with symptoms possibly linked to melamine contamination. The Hong Kong Health Department's Center for Food Safety website, located at www.cfs.gov.hk has dedicated up-to-date postings and links specifically following melamine contamination and related issues, to include detailed product identification, test results and official guidance. End Summary

The Hong Kong Response

12. (SBU) The responses by Hong Kong government (HKG) officials and health institutions to the September 11 Beijing announcement that melamine had been found in baby formula produced in mainland China have been swift and transparent. The Hong Kong press has covered the story exhaustively. Secretary for Food and Health, Dr. York Chow, has issued several public statements in an attempt to reassure Hong Kong's citizenry and describe concrete steps taken by the HKG to protect public health. One of the first steps included the Hospital Authority's establishment of a pediatric renal taskforce based at Princess Margaret Hospital, and designation of seven Special Assessment Centers, supported by 18 specialty clinics. These clinics are providing free assessments, and will centrally monitor and coordinate care for children (under 12) showing symptoms possibly linked to melamine contamination. Macau authorities, following Hong Kong's lead, have likewise taken steps to protect public health. Such steps included the banning of the import and sale of products that have tested

positive by the Hong Kong government, and the suspension of Macau's school lunch boxed milk program, which relied on milk imported from mainland China manufactured by Yili.

13. (U) Testing of milk-based products began almost immediately, with the first results published on September 16 and near daily updates since then. As of September 23, over 376 samples from a variety of milk-based products had been tested; ten samples, all from products manufactured in Mainland China, were positive for melamine. The products which tested positive include milk, yogurt, ice cream, dark chocolate, and red-bean ice bars. Positive results for melamine ranged from 1.4 to 21 ppm. (For up-to-date details on specific products tested, official announcements, frequently asked questions related to melamine, and guidance for physicians, see the Hong Kong Center for Food Safety web site at www.cfs.gov.hk.)

14. (SBU) Reacting to these positive tests for melamine and the diagnosis of a second infant with likely melamine-linked renal stones, Hong Kong authorities amended the Harmful Substance in Food Regulations on 22 September, effective September 23, to ban the importation, consignment, manufacture and sale of milk or any food product intended for children under the age of 36 months and pregnant or lactating women, with melamine concentrations of more than 1 ppm; it also bans any food product containing melamine in excess of 2.5 ppm. Violations of this regulation are subject to a maximum fine of HK\$50,000 (US\$6,410) and six months' imprisonment. In explaining the melamine ban, Hong Kong Secretary for Food and Health, York Chow, explained that law

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makers had to allow room for a tiny amount of the industrial chemical, used to make plastic, due to the effect of migration from containers and environmental pollution, but "the most direct way to protect ourselves is to ban this substance in our food."

15. (SBU) Even before test results were available, Hong Kong's two largest grocery chains, Wellcome and Park-n-Shop, began to voluntarily remove and offer refunds for products which had been manufactured by the three Chinese dairy firms associated with melamine contamination. Grocers continue to be proactive and conservative in pulling additional products as information becomes available. Pulled products include those from mainland Chinese manufacturing firms as well as imports from Japan and Taiwan with milk content thought to have derived from mainland Chinese manufactures.

Melamine-Linked Illness Now Outside the Mainland

16. (U) In apparently the first human melamine-linked illness reported outside of the Mainland, HKG's Center for Health Protection and the Department of Health reported on September 20 that it had received notification from the Hospital Authority of a case of renal disease likely resulting from drinking low-fat milk processed by the Yili Industrial Group Co. The three-year-old patient was referred to Princess Margaret Hospital, where she is being treated for a renal stone in her left kidney. She is expected to make a full recovery. On September 22, the Hospital Authority confirmed the diagnosis of a second patient with likely melamine-related renal disease in the Special Administrative Region. The second patient was a Hong Kong-born infant living in mainland China, where he was diagnosed with a renal stone and then brought to Princess Margaret Hospital by his father.

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